DAILY VARIETY

Time for truce between Stonistas and

VAN GORDON SAUTER

BACKTALK

WOULD SOMEONE PLEASE PAGE CYRUS VANCE in Yugoslavia and tell him that he and the mediators are needed in Hollywood? Catch the next available plane!

Can we just get a few platoons of those incredibly expensive United Nations peacekeepers relocated to the East Coast from Cambodia or wherever? Like yesterday?

And there must be some old cans of green paint in Beirut we can use to draw a wide truce line north and south through the Great Basin, separating the warring factions.

Folks, we need a respite. A dose of tranquility. This has gone on too long.

The war should stop.

The Stonistas and the Warrenologists must be separated. Disarmed. Defused. Now.

We can not take much more of these incessant and repetitive arguments over whether the film "JFK" is evil or revelatory.

Whether Oliver Stone is a patriotic genius or a dissembling mountebank.

Whether the President was taken out by a solitary lunatic or a multi-agency, multinational collection of assassins.

Whether the Warren Report was the highest truth that could be achieved at the time it was written or whether it was another seditious cog in a Machiavellian plot to eradicate heroes and undermine democracy.

Guys, you've made your points. On both sides of the issue.

YES, OLIVER STONE IS A BRILLIANT FILMMAKER, but his epic movie plays fast and loose with the facts and elevates an appallingly loutish investigator to heroic stature.

And yes, Earl Warren was an honorable man who made this a better country. But that report bearing his name no longer makes us feel comfortable. In fact, one suddenly realizes there was a lot of troubling information that wasn't considered.

We have reached that stage where our consciousness has been raised — to the point where we are getting acute headaches from these fiery advocates banging us against the ceiling. Indeed, one can now go to a casual meal with a perfectly level-headed colleague only to discover that surreptitiously he has read eight assassination books. Not only that, he finds it perfectly plausible that some zealots hiding in a Dallas sewer raised a 48-pound metal cover in Dealey Plaza and, unnoticed by anyone, popped the President.

So Stonistas and Warrenologists, rest on your laurels. You guys have succeeded in forcing us to re-examine our familiar assumptions, no matter on which side they fall.

Warrenologists

TRUTH IS ELUSIVE, and ultimately personal. We are now going through the process of saying, yes, on one hand, it's A, but still, on the other hand, it damned well could be B.

We are not quite sure about any of it now. And that is the right attitude to take into history.

But your constant harangue is spooking us.

You are transforming this from a mandate to seek information, to zero-base the assumptions, to some kind of media-based gotcha game.

So move along.

Stone, go create a new movie. Find some other theme from the '60s where the calumny of popular history or the establishment must be avenged.

And you, the journalists and lawyers who are loathe to concede to filmmakers what is routinely accorded to, say, novelists, back off.

Go fret about Tibet or the October Surprise or cocaine deals in the congressional mail room.

IN SPITE OF YOUR WORST FEARS, "JFK" was just a movie. It won't undermine democracy or history. And it won't overnight turn to dust your columns and clips and briefs.

Emancipate us. Let us now sort through the facts and opinions you have placed before us. More accurately, shoved in our faces.

Let us create our own history. Without your serving as scolding proctors.

Van Gordon Sauter, twice president of CBS News, reviews TV for Daily Variety and teaches at UC Berkeley.